

Light

A group of African children, mostly young boys, are standing outdoors in front of trees and foliage. The children are looking towards the camera. One child in the foreground, on the left, is holding a clear plastic bottle filled with a red liquid. The children are wearing simple clothing, including a yellow shirt and a tank top with a cartoon character. The word "Light" is written in large, white, stylized letters across the top left of the image.

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...on a New World

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Cover picture: Children from Nansanga Village, Uganda



International problems the Bible's answer

World Poverty

POVERTY IS A world wide problem. According to UNICEF, 30,000 children die each day due to poverty. That totals about 210,000 children each week, or about 11 million children under five years of age, each year. Here are some more facts about poverty:

The Gross Domestic Product of the poorest 48 nations (i.e. a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the combined wealth of the world's three richest people.

- 20% of the population in the developed nations consumes 86% of the world's goods.
- 1.3 billion people live on less than the equivalent of a dollar a day.
- Nearly three billion people, roughly half the world's population, live on less than the equivalent of two dollars a day.
- 1.3 billion people do not have access to clean water.
- 3 billion people do not have access to sanitation.
- 2 billion people do not have access to electricity.
- 12% of the world's population uses 85% of its water; none of these live in the Third World.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN RICH AND POOR



Somali mother and dying child

The gap between rich and poor not only gets ever wider, fewer people control the bulk of the world's wealth and an ever increasing part of that wealth is owned by multinational corporations. Approximately 842 million people go hungry each day. Most of these live in third world countries, but 10 million live in rich industrialised nations.

Compared with even the relatively recent past, many countries of the world enjoy greater wealth and abundance of food than ever before.

Wealthier societies as a result generally have improved health and resources. Increasing

agricultural productivity has produced a situation where in theory there is enough food for all. However the problem is that food is neither produced nor distributed equitably. Whilst millions starve, obesity is an increasing problem in richer countries.

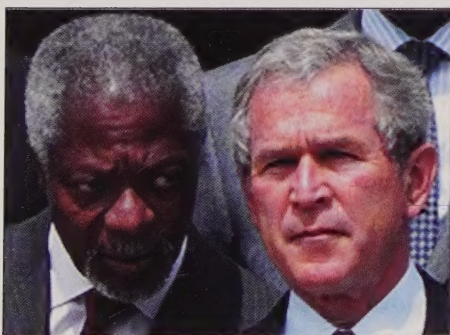
Poverty and malnutrition increase risk of disease and premature death. The World Health Organisation (2003) suggests that:

- Poor people may eat and absorb too little nutritious food, making them more disease-prone.

- Inadequate or inappropriate food leads to stunted development and/or premature death.
- Nutrient-deficient diets provoke health problems; malnutrition increases susceptibility to disease.
- Disease decreases people's ability to cultivate or purchase nutritious foods.

This downward spiral of poverty and illness may result in premature death. At the time of writing this article the world population is about 6.3 billion, of which one source estimates 6 million died due to starvation during the first six months of this year.

THE G8 SUMMIT



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (L) speaks to U.S. President George W. Bush as they arrive for a group photo session at the end of the G8 summit at Gleneagles, Scotland, July 8, 2005.

Concerned and well-intentioned people have tried to highlight the consequences of poverty and starvation that affect mankind on a global scale. At a recent G8 summit meeting an agreement was reached to cancel some third world debts and try to tackle poverty. Whilst this summit was taking place protestors called for these eight wealthy nations to **'make poverty history'** and **'make war history'**.

Following the summit, though some progress and promises of aid were made, Reuters commented that *'Africa has heard rich nations promise to help the continent out of poverty before, but has ended up with little more than crumbs'*.

World leaders pose for a group photo at the end of the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. Whilst pleased with the result, Tony Blair noted that 'measures agreed by leaders of the Group of Eight nations to help lift Africa out of poverty will count for nothing unless African governments put their own houses in order.'



THE FAILINGS OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

A recent interview with a spokesperson for the Nigerian President Obasanjo highlighted that a sum of \$300 million had been spent on a football stadium in the capital Abuja, rather than being spent on providing food and other aid for the people.

Despite aid that has been given by governments it is really only about 0.3% of annual expenditure, a very small amount of their wealth. Though agreement has been reached to increase this to 0.7% by 2015 many doubt if merely giving aid is the answer. Trading restrictions, corruption, greed, mismanagement, lack of skills, poor climate conditions and lack of resources are all blamed for contributing to the continuation of human suffering and misery.

Can world governments *'make poverty history'*? History amply demonstrates that human governments are incapable of resolving the problems of poverty, disease and death. Why? Because the root cause of so much misery can all be boiled down to one factor – human nature and sin - a turning away from God's just laws. Will God allow this state of affairs to continue?

THE DIVINE SOLUTION

No! God will send the Lord Jesus and set up His Kingdom. Jesus will be a righteous King dispensing justice to the whole world. The

return of Jesus has formed the subject of other articles, so let's concentrate now upon the solution to the problem and the contrast between present world poverty and the Kingdom to come.

If we look around at the spiritual state of the world, we see many cultures, beliefs, and churches. They can't all be right. We read that God's word is truth; there can only ever be one truth. The earth is full of spiritual darkness; yet the time will come when as Isaiah foretold:

'He (God) will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations' [*Isaiah 25.7*].

That shroud of spiritual darkness that envelops all nations will be lifted; the nations of the world will then understand the Divine purpose in creation. The peoples of the earth will then want to seek God with one accord:

'Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us his ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.'

[*Isaiah 2.3*]

It may be said the nations will have no choice but to serve God under threat of punishment. However the justice of God's law will be undeniable and mankind will want to seek him. The spiritual darkness of the world will be lifted by the work of Christ as foretold by the prophet Jeremiah:

'No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.' says the LORD...' [*Jeremiah 31.34*].

Then at last, as all true Christians pray, the Lord's will - shall be done on earth, as it is now done in heaven. The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a great temple that will be built as a '*House of prayer for all nations*'. All nations will go to that temple and indeed will desire to go. The prophet Zechariah wrote:

'Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'

[Zechariah 8.23]

True Christians recognise that mankind is powerless to resolve the overwhelming problem of poverty and disease. They look forward to the day when Jesus will return and all the things that God has promised become living reality.

A CURSE ON THE GROUND

The harmony that first existed between man and his Creator in Eden will be restored. The curse that came as a result of sin will be lifted and mankind will return to an agricultural way of life. As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God's command, the Lord said to Adam:

'...Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat from it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.'

[Genesis 3.17-19]

We see abundant evidence of the truth of these words in the world about us and in our own mortality. Contrast this with the age to come when the words of the Old Testament prophets will be fulfilled:

‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘When the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed’ [*Amos 9.13*].

‘...I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields’ [*Ezekiel 36.29-30*].

So many areas of the world are desert land and wilderness, indeed one report says that the desert areas of the world are increasing rapidly each year by several hundred square miles. In contrast, the Scriptures depict a wonderful view of what the earth will be like in the Kingdom age:

‘The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God...For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water’ [*Isaiah 35.1-7*].

‘There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon.’ [*Psalms 72.16*]

Who could imagine the deserts of the world becoming a place of

streams and pasture or producing food? Who now could imagine crops growing even on the tops of mountains? But such will be the conditions in the kingdom of God.

OLD AGE AND SICKNESS

Now, the changes that will take place in the Kingdom age, will include a change in the nature of mankind as well. All human beings experience disease, disability, old age and ultimately death. The reason for this situation is given by Isaiah:

‘The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth, its people must bear their guilt’.

[Isaiah 24.5-6. NIV]

God gave mankind dominion over his environment and all that He had created. However, we have only to look at our environment to see how ‘*the earth is defiled by its people*’. Human nature has not changed since Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator. People throughout the ages have turned their backs on God, breaking his covenants and laws, then paying the penalty for their disobedience. Disease, disability, general human frailty and ultimately death, are a direct result of disobedience to God.

However, when people live by God’s just law, they will eventually be reconciled to their Creator. In the Kingdom age we read that ‘*The inhabitant shall not say I am sick.*’ [Isaiah 33.24]. God also promises:

‘Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.’ [Isaiah 35.5-6].

What a wonderful thought that all the things which ail mankind now, will be things of the past. No more poverty and malnutrition - no need to fear such things as cancer, heart disease, strokes and other illnesses. God has promised as we read in Isaiah:

‘...behold, I create new heavens and a new earth’...No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people, And my elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, Nor bring forth children for trouble; For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, And their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear’ [*Isaiah 65.17, 20-24*].

THE REWARD OF THE FAITHFUL

The Bible gives us hope for the future! A great transformation will take place in this world. Bible prophecy indicates that this time of great change will come soon. Those who believe the Word of God, have faith and put that faith into action in their lives can look forward with hope and joy to the time when Jesus will return. Paul writes of that time in words that all true believers anticipate as the culmination of their hope in Christ:

‘...we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our

lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body' [Philippians 3.21 NIV].

Then as God has promised, *'those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint'* [Isaiah 40.31]. The Apostle John decried that time of perfection in words taken from the prophet Isaiah: *'...there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away'* [Revelation 21.4; see also Isaiah 25.8].

CONCLUSION

We have considered some aspects of life in this world of great contrasts but hopefully sufficient to demonstrate to you the reader how this world will change. For those who truly love God and believe his word, there is every incentive to maintain hope bright and alive despite the poverty and suffering that overshadows the lives of millions of people.

The Apostle Paul wrote: *'faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'* [Hebrews 11.1]. Faith is a conviction about the truth of God's Word even though His promises will not be a reality until Christ returns. Faith believes that God's word cannot fail, as we read:

'For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.' [Isaiah 55.10-11]

The Word of God cannot fail; it will accomplish all that He intends. It is as certain as the cycle of creation. Having faith – *'Is what the ancients were commended for'* [Hebrews 11.2 NIV]. Men like Abraham and David who believed the promises that God made to them will live once again and inherit the new world order. God has promised that those who believe His Word will also find mercy and salvation as Isaiah records:

'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And he will have mercy on him; And to our God, For he will abundantly pardon. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways', says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, And my thoughts than your thoughts.' [Isaiah 55.7-9].

The world struggles under a burden of inequalities that bring about so much human suffering. Mankind does not have the answer, but God does. His gracious offer of salvation and a better life in His Kingdom is open to all who believe and trust His Word. Will you respond to His mercy and love?

Andy Peel
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Parables of Jesus

The Pounds

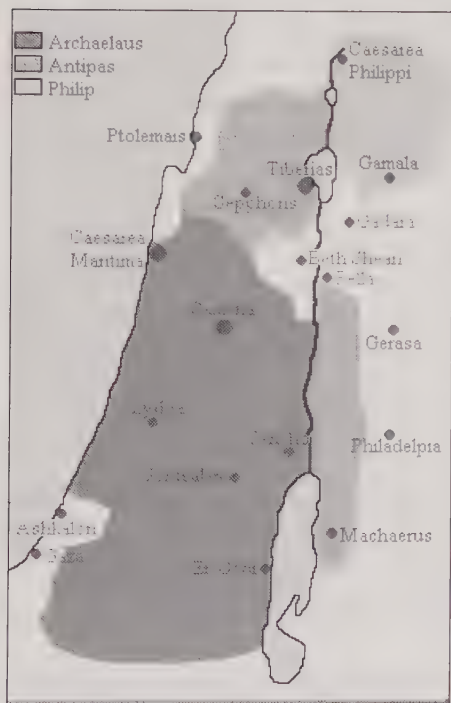
A PARABLE IS a story which tells us profound truths about something else. The word parable in Greek literally means '*the placing of one thing beside another*' and we can readily think of similar words that use the same idea such as 'parallel' or 'paramedic'. In Bible usage a parable has been described as, '*an earthly story with a heavenly meaning*' (Online Bible, Woodside Bible Fellowship). In the 'Parable of the Pounds' in Luke chapter 19 we have an excellent example of this idea.

Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem. He was nearing a milestone in God's plan of salvation for mankind and he knew that he would soon be crucified. But many of his followers expected nothing of the kind. Many believed that Jesus was going to enter Jerusalem and become the new king of Israel in fulfillment of God's promise to David [2 Samuel 7.12,13]. Jesus had taught his friends to pray for God's '*kingdom to come*' and for His '*will be done on earth*' [Matthew 6.9-10]. Jesus knew that he would one day become king of Israel and that this would form the nucleus of the worldwide kingdom of God. But not yet - the glory could only come after the pain and suffering of his coming ordeal.

'...He (Jesus) spoke another parable, because he was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' [Luke 19.11,12].

BACKGROUND TO THE PARABLE

This parable has as its background some extraordinary events that would have been common knowledge to the original hearers of the parable but which have been largely forgotten today.



After the death of King Herod the Great, jurisdiction was divided between two of Herod's sons. Herod Antipas became ruler of the territories of Galilee and Peraea while the other son, Herod Archelaus became ruler of the territories of Judea, Samaria and Idumea. The territories given to Archelaus included the ancient capital city of Jerusalem.

It had been Herod the Great's intention for Archelaus to be crowned king, but as the whole area was part of the Roman Empire nothing could be done without Roman approval. The Roman Emperor Augustus only allowed Archelaus the title of

'Ethnarch', or national leader.

Rather than assuming the title of king himself and generating hostility with Rome, Archelaus travelled to Rome and was eventually crowned king by Augustus. In his absence however simmering resentment led to serious rioting. Archelaus' troops were unable to contain the situation and the Roman Governor of Syria had to intervene with no less than three full Roman legions. King Archelaus therefore returned to Jerusalem with Roman troops to ensure stability and to deal with the instigators of the rebellion.

THE NOBLEMAN AND ARCHELAUS

This background would give added power to Jesus' words. It is worth picking out the similarities between Archelaus, the parable and events which were to happen to Jesus:

- Archelaus had gone away to Rome, to use the wording of the parable he was the '*certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return*' [Luke 19.12]. Jesus was also going to go away, not to Rome but to heaven [Acts 1.9-11].
- Archelaus had returned from Rome to become king, to quote the parable again, '*And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom*' [Luke 19.15]. Jesus would also return, and he would become the king of the world. As angels were later to tell Peter, James and John: '*this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner*' [Acts 1.11].
- Many of the people disliked Archelaus before he went to Rome, in the words of the parable '*But his citizens hated him*' [Luke 19.14]. Many people resented Jesus at that time and failed to recognise him as the rightful heir to the Jewish throne.
- When Archelaus had left the country, dislike turned into open rebellion. The parable says that his citizens '*sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'*' [Luke 19.14]. It is a sad fact that many people right down to this very day doubt the literal physical return of Jesus to establish God's kingdom on earth, even though it is so clearly taught in the Bible. (See Matthew 16.27, Matthew 24.30,31, Daniel 2.44, Isaiah 2.2-4 to quote but a few examples). Most people today would rather trust in politicians to guide their futures, instead of putting their faith in God despite such warnings in the Scriptures;

‘Do not put your trust in princes, *Nor* in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish’ [Psalm 146.3, 4].

- When Archelaus returned from Rome the leaders of the rebellion either made peace or were killed. The parable says, *‘bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me’* [Luke 19.27]. The Bible foretells a future war between Jesus and his immortal saints against a coalition of nations unwilling to bow to the rule of God’s king. (See for example Joel 3.9-17, Zechariah 14.1-9 and Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39).
- Although we do not have any historical confirmation, it is reasonable to suppose that upon his return Archelaus would want to know how his supporters had fared while he had been away and reward them accordingly. The parable certainly makes this point: *‘he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading’* [Luke 19.15]. The rewards were places of authority and control under the new king, *‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities’* [Luke 19.17].

Jesus taught that one of his actions when he returns to the earth will be to judge his followers. The reward of the righteous will firstly be eternal life [Matthew 25.46]; but also to become stakeholders in the kingdom:

‘Then the King will say to those on His right hand, *‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’* [Matthew 25.34]. Jesus specifically promised places of authority to his twelve disciples, *‘when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’* [Matthew 19.28].

■ Archelaus had very real power but effectively ruled on Rome's behalf. No attempt was made to take power to himself and his policies always followed the will of Rome. One of the powerful temptations in the wilderness was for Jesus to take control of the kingdom at that time [Matthew 4.7-11]. Jesus overcame this temptation and was later able to state, *'For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.'* [John 12.49]. In God's future kingdom Jesus will be king, but ruling on God's behalf.

For all the similarities between Archelaus and Jesus, it must also be stated that there were enormous differences. Archelaus was a wicked man craving power for human reasons. Jesus is the finest human being who has ever lived who will become king in order to bring peace and righteousness to the earth. Archelaus' reign was a complete disaster and eventually he was banished to Gaul. By the time that Jesus commenced his ministry, Judea had been taken completely under Roman rule. By then power was administered directly by Roman procurators. At the time the parable was given the procurator was a man called Pontius Pilate. By contrast Jesus' reign will be one of peace, fruitfulness and joy (See Isaiah chapter 35).

So already we can see what an efficient vehicle the parable is for conveying a complex message. Reference is made to familiar events and this shared knowledge is then used to add detail to what is specifically stated.

THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE

We have already seen that the stated purpose of the parable was to dispel notions that the kingdom would be declared there and then. The fact was that not even Jesus knew when the kingdom would be set up, that date is known only to God and no other, as Jesus himself states, *'of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not*

know when the time is.' [Mark 13.32-33]. So the parable, using the Archelaus events as a background, goes on to talk about how Jesus' followers should be acting while he is away.

There are ten servants. Each is given one mina, equal to 100 drachmas, a considerable sum of money for the day, certainly far more than the 'pound' of the King James version from which the parable gets its common name. The servants are instructed to 'do business' with the money.



When he returns the ten servants are summoned to the king and asked how they have managed the money. The first servant has done well; his single mina has earned ten minas. The second servant has also done well; his mina has earned five minas. They are both rewarded with responsible positions of authority in the kingdom. We don't know how six of the remainder did, but there is one servant who declares that he has kept the mina safe in a handkerchief! He had ignored the command to do business with the money; he hadn't even given it to the bank so that it might earn interest. He had failed miserably. So the mina is taken off him and given to the most profitable of the other servants.

The logic is overwhelming. In the natural world people invest

their money in those who will work the hardest and give them the best return. Jesus will only give us authority in his kingdom if we are profitable servants, if we are able to give a return on the investment of love he has made in us. He was about to give his life for his friends in a terrible death on the cross and those pounds ('minas') are precious indeed (See John 15.13).

How do we become friends of Jesus Christ? The answer is by becoming more like him. The more we use Christ-like qualities the more they grow. That's a wonderful thought for Christ-like qualities are actually far more profitable than anything else. If you want to buy something then you give money or other goods in exchange for the product you want to buy. But if you give love to someone, you haven't lost any love in order to do it, and because you have shown love to others the chances are they will show love back to you and so the more we show love, the more loving (and loved) we become.

The same can be said about other Christ-like qualities. The more faith we show, the more faithful we become. The more self-control we exercise over our actions, the stronger we become. The more right things we do the more righteous we become. In all of these characteristics we never of course reach the lofty standards of Jesus, but the point is that we need to be making use of those characteristics we do have.

Because the reverse is also true. If we don't show love, if we don't believe God, if we give free reign to our emotions and if it's too much trouble to do the right thing, then we need not complain when the love that Jesus has invested in us is removed when he returns to set up the kingdom of God.

Jonathan Rowland
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What must I do to be saved?

NEARLY 2,000 YEARS ago this question was asked by a prison keeper at Philippi. Two new prisoners had been admitted that day. At midnight there was a great earthquake that shook the prison foundations. All the doors were opened and the prisoners' chains came loose. Strangely enough, not one of the prisoners escaped.

The jailer thought that the captives had fled and was about to kill himself for fear of punishment from his superiors; but the two newest prisoners dissuaded him. The jailer must have known the religious persuasion of Paul and Silas as their preaching had caused great problems in the city of Philippi. Also they had openly prayed and sung hymns of praise to God in the prison.

Realising that God had intervened by the earthquake, the jailer was moved to ask this important question: '*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*' [Acts 16.30] The captor was asking his captives their advice on how to be saved! Why should he be asking them what to do to be saved? Surely the prisoners needed saving and should have been asking him! Obviously the jailer was keen to know how to be saved from something more than prison bonds, or punishment for a crime.

SAVED FROM WHAT?

By his question the jailer had in mind the preaching of Paul and Silas with regard to '*the way of salvation*' [Acts 16.17]. The '*salvation*' or '*saving*' of which Paul and Silas spoke, was about saving from death. All men and women need saving from death and if we are to understand what we need to do to be saved we must understand why we die. We must also understand the remedy God has provided, believe that the remedy is effectual and by so believing, act accordingly.

To understand the reason why we die we must go back to the time when our first parents Adam and Eve, were created by God. The book of Genesis describes God's creation as being '*very good*' [Genesis 1.31]. At that time Adam and Eve did not have the '*knowledge of good and evil*'. Although God saw that His creation was '*very good*' he would only derive great pleasure from the willing response of a person who had freewill and who chose to obey Him. God devised a simple test to see if our first parents would make the right choice – to believe, trust and obey Him.

Adam and Eve were told by God that they could freely eat of every tree in the garden of Eden – with one exception. They must not eat of '*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*' [Genesis 2.16,17]. Why? Firstly because of God's command and secondly because of the consequences of disobeying – they would know good and evil and would be punished with death.

Adam and Eve failed the simple test and by this act did not give God any pleasure at all. They chose not to believe Him - they chose not to trust Him and they chose not to obey Him. Instead they ate of the fruit of the tree and God was true to His word – they were punished with death. Disobeying God is described in the Bible as 'sin'. Adam and Eve sinned and became 'sinners' deserving of death. No longer could they be described as '*very good*' for by their sin they had made a great divide between God their Creator and themselves. The consequences were far-reaching – for all of Adam's descendants have inherited his sin prone human nature – have the '*knowledge of good and evil*' and therefore are subject to death. The Apostle Paul confirms this in his letter to the Romans: '*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*' [Romans 5.12].

God was and still is just and right to mete out the death penalty to all who are 'sinners' because this is the condition of the test he gave our first parents. If men and women continue to sin by breaking God's commands they will die.

THE DIVINE REMEDY

If a man could live a perfect life, displaying Divine characteristics and obeying God's will at all times – should that man die? No – but it would appear that no-one can live a sinless life and therefore the human race is without hope – or is it? The remedy we need is to be made sinless and this appears to be unattainable. But there is a remedy for God is a God of great mercy and He is '*not willing that any should perish*' [2 Peter 3.9]. He has provided the remedy through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ [John 3.16]. Jesus lived a sinless life. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus was tempted like us '*yet without sin*' [Hebrews 4.15]. By leading a sinless life, Jesus found favour with God and God was pleased with His Son. [Mark 1.11].

Now Jesus was fully aware of the tendencies of human nature to commit sin. He also was a descendant of Adam through his mother Mary and under the law of sin and death that affected all of Adam's descendants [Galatians 4.4]. His mission was made plain in the announcement of the angel at his birth: '*...you shall call his name Jesus, (meaning Saviour) for he will save his people from their sins*' [Matthew 1.21]. This angelic message was fulfilled in his death on the cross – it was a sacrifice of a sinless life. According to God's righteous law, Jesus inherited human nature and was subject to death. However, because of his perfect character, the grave could not justifiably keep him and God raised him from the dead. As the Apostle Peter wrote: '*...God raised up (Jesus), having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it*' [Acts 2.24].

WHAT ABOUT US?

How can this help you and me? Unlike Jesus, we are sinners and are deserving of death. This is where the grace and mercy of God fit in. God has through the work of Jesus, invited men and women to identify with His Son – with his sacrifice and with his resurrection from the dead. You do not have to be sinless to benefit from this great act of Divine mercy for God is able to forgive us our sins.

If you believe that death is the Divine punishment for sin – if you believe that Jesus led a sinless life – the only man to succeed in this – if you believe that he died as a sacrifice for sin and was raised from the dead – you have laid the foundation for becoming related to the saving work of Jesus. If you want God to reverse the death penalty started in Eden you must live your life according to His will and the way to do this has been shown in the life of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Those who heard Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost asked the same question [Acts 2.37]. The answer was '*Repent and...be baptised* [Acts 2.38]. Repentance is a conscious decision on the part of a believer to change one's way of life. Belief comes first – belief in God and his plan of salvation centred in the work of Jesus. Belief must be followed by baptism – a humble act of immersion in water before witnesses, to publicly demonstrate your belief and to identify with the sacrifice of Christ [Mark 16.16; Romans 6.3-5].

What good news! Believe and be baptised and you will be saved. This is only the beginning however as you will discover by reading the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter six which tells us what is expected of the baptised believer – we urge you to read this chapter carefully. Those who like the Philippian Jailer identify with Jesus in this way, are freed from sin because God will forgive them and give them the hope of resurrection and unending life at the return of Jesus. Paul summarises this in the concluding words of Romans chapter six:

'But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' [Romans 6.22,23].

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Bible Cities

Nazareth

ON ROUTE 60 about 131km (81 miles) north of Jerusalem and about 28km (17 miles) west of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, is the site of the ancient Biblical city of Nazareth. The remnants of the ancient city are almost lost amongst the sprawl of today's city. Modern Nazareth is very much an Arab town with an Arab mayor and yet it has a mixed population of some sixty thousand inhabitants consisting mainly of Christian and Muslim Israeli Arabs.



Modern Nazareth

One traveller who visited the area in the early 19th century gave his impression of Nazareth in these words: *'Nazareth is on a downward slope of a hill...the vale that spreads out before it resembles a circular basin that is surrounded by mountains...it is a rich and delightful area.'* Another visitor of the same period describes the town that existed then as a place *'with streets narrow and steep, the houses which are flat-roofed, are about two hundred and fifty in number with about two thousand inhabitants.'* This could have been a similar description of how Nazareth looked in the time of Jesus.

Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament but we are introduced to it in the New Testament where we read that the angel Gabriel was sent by God to speak to a young Jewish girl named Mary, *'...to a city of Galilee named Nazareth'* [Luke 1.26].

It is assumed from this verse and others in the Bible, that this ancient town of Nazareth was the birthplace of this privileged young Jewish maiden, Mary the mother of Jesus but there are scholars who dispute this, pointing to the verses that connect Mary and her husband Joseph to Bethlehem. But modern Nazareth is very firm in its claim and visitors to the city see this reflected in the abundance of churches and shrines and the many tourist gift shops all dedicated to Mary and her son Jesus.

In the times when the Roman Empire occupied Israel, when the land was called Palestine, it seems that the town of Nazareth was of no great importance. We get some idea of how it was viewed from a remark made by Nathaniel, one of the disciples of Jesus, who said, *'Can anything good come out of Nazareth'* [John 1.46]. This may have been a popular remark at the time, coupled with a general tendency to despise this obscure town of Nazareth.

There is perhaps an explanation if we go back in the Bible to the times of King Solomon, when Hiram king of Tyre was supplying

Solomon with cedar, cypress and gold to build the temple and his own palace in Jerusalem. As a surety Solomon gave Hiram twenty unnamed cities in Galilee. It is interesting that when we read about this transaction we notice that, *'...Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, but they did not please him. So he said, 'What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother?' And he called them the land of Cabul' [1 Kings 9.12,13].* The name Cabul is said to be like the Hebrew for 'good-for-nothing'. So we can ask, was the town of Nazareth among these 'good-for-nothing' cities in Galilee that so disappointed Hiram?

Yet another reason for the way the Jews generally viewed the towns of Galilee like Nazareth, is perhaps the fact that in Old Testament times the northern half of Israel was subject to invaders and settled by other nations. One noted authority says of Galilee just before the times of Jesus; *'Owing to the pressures from people farther north, its Jewish population found themselves .. surrounded on three sides by non-Jewish populations .. under the Maccabees,(165-38 BC) the Gentile influence upon the Jews became so strong that the Jews were actually withdrawn south for half a century. Thus Galilee had to be recolonized, and this fact, together with its diversity of population, contributed to the contempt felt for the Galileans by the southern Jews [Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Part 1, Page 537 Inter-Varsity Press].* The writer of this note gives as an example the contempt displayed when Nicodemus was at one stage defending Jesus from the ruling Pharisees council, who then rounded angrily on him saying, *'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee' [John 7.52].*

So it happened that this despised town of Nazareth was chosen by God to be the place that would nurture Jesus from a young age through childhood and adolescence and into manhood. Perhaps it was all to emphasise the humble background of Jesus, beginning with his lowly birth in a stable in Bethlehem and continuing in virtual obscurity in Nazareth until the time came for him to be revealed to his people.

In the Gospel record of Luke we learn that after Joseph and Mary had taken the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to carry out purification rituals required by the law, *'...they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.'* [Luke 2.39,40]. When we think about some of those words in this verse that describe Jesus as *'strong'* and *'wise'* with the *'grace of God upon him'*, we have an insight into what the people of Nazareth must have witnessed and experienced, as this Son of God grew up as their neighbour, through his childhood into adolescence and manhood.



View of Nazareth by David Roberts 1839

This was the privilege that the people of ancient Nazareth enjoyed as he lived and worked among them. They must have known him very well as he mixed with them, until the time when he reached the age of about thirty and then he suddenly left Nazareth. But news came about him, reporting that he was now preaching throughout the whole region of Galilee teaching in the synagogues of all the towns he visited. Then we read that *'he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up'* [Luke 4.16].

We are then told that during this visit to Nazareth, on the Sabbath day, Jesus went to the synagogue there. This was a place of worship where he was well known and the attendant handed him the scroll of Isaiah to read. Jesus read out a portion from Isaiah chapter 61. He then astounded his former neighbours in Nazareth by saying that the Scripture he had just quoted applied to him! He was telling them that he was the person that Isaiah and all the other Old Testament prophets wrote about, he was their Messiah!

Luke tells us that these people of Nazareth at first *'marvelled at the gracious words'* which Jesus spoke. However it seems that the meaning of the words of this man who had grown up and lived and worked among them, gradually sank in, their *'marvelling'* turned to incredulity and disbelief.

Mark's Gospel record says that *'...many hearing him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to him, that such mighty works are performed by his hands! Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?' And they were offended at him. [Mark 6.2,3].*

As the meaning and importance of the words of Jesus hit home with the people of Nazareth, their amazement turned to annoyance. Here was this man they had known from a boy – a kind and gracious man who had lived among them, who had probably carried out work for most of them, built their houses, repaired their ploughs, helped them in many ways with those skilful hands. But now here he was in their synagogue, saying that he was the promised Jewish Messiah, the one that their sacred Scriptures spoke so much about.

It was all too much for the people of Nazareth and their disbelief and angry reactions were such that Jesus *'could do no mighty work there'* [verse 5]. Luke records that Jesus bluntly told them that their disbelief showed that they were no better than the Israelites of the times

of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. When they heard this, *'all those in the synagogue...were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city; and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, he went his way [Luke 4.28,29].*

What a testimony this event in the Nazareth synagogue is to the frailty of the human nature we possess. In a flash we see that the emotions of religious piety and worship turned into a lynch mob mentality. Their momentary admiration for Jesus turned like lightning into hostile anger, fury, hate and savage intent. But the time for Christ's sacrifice had not yet come and he walked away safely from these murderous people of Nazareth. There is no record that he ever went there again.

The importance of Nazareth to students of the Bible relates to the life of one of its inhabitants who grew up there 2,000 years ago. In most cases where there is reference to the town, it is because the most wonderful man who ever walked this earth, Jesus of Nazareth, lived there for most of his life before he commenced his ministry. His neighbours rejected him but their loss can be our gain – if we listen to his teaching and apply it in our lives.

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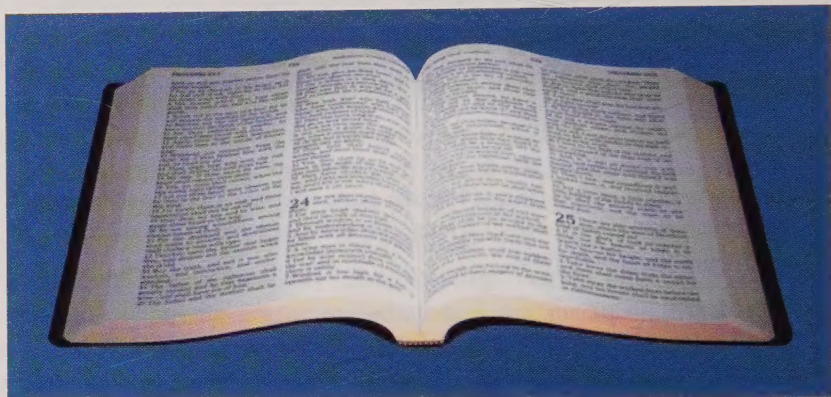
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